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ABSTRACT

This report discusses demographic characteristics of migrant students in the United States, their educational needs, the features of federally-funded programs under the Migrant Education Program (MEP) legislation reform, and suggestions for enhancing current migrant student performance. The MEP was established in 1966 and reauthorized in 1994. It provides educational services for migrant students and facilitates interstate coordination of these services. Demographics outlined include geographical distribution by state, age, and language of the program participants. Educational needs reviewed include factors of mobility, work and family responsibilities, poverty, and language and culture. The 1994 reauthorization mandated reforms that focused limited federal funds on the neediest students with the highest risk of academic failure. Strategies for improving migrant student performance include classroom buddies, parent outreach, attention to warning signs, extracurricular activities, and effective schooling. Information is included on the three program coordination centers operated under the Office of Migrant Education; these centers were scheduled to be replaced by 15 comprehensive regional assistance centers in 1995. (Contains 22 references.) (NAV)

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Directions
IN LANGUAGE & EDUCATION

Vol. 1, No. 8

Education of Migrant Children in the United States

by Anneka L. Kindler, NCBE

Children of migrant farmworkers and fishers are among the most educationally disadvantaged children in the country (Salerno, 1991). The conditions associated with their migratory lifestyle impose multiple obstacles to educational achievement, such as discontinuity in education, social and cultural isolation, strenuous work outside of school, extreme poverty, and poor health (Strang et al., 1993). Limited proficiency in English imposes an additional educational burden on many migrant children (Henderson et al., 1994).

The federally funded Migrant Education Program (MEP) was established in 1966 to support state programs designed to meet the complex educational needs of migrant students and to facilitate interstate coordination of services. Federally supported regular school year and summer term programs have played an important role in improving educational opportunities for migrant students; however, migrant children continue to experience high dropout rates, low achievement levels, and slow progress through school (Salerno, 1991). The reauthorization of the MEP under the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA), authorized to be funded at $310,000,000 in FY 1995, is anticipated to bring about needed improvements in the delivery of services to migrant students (USED, 1994).

This synthesis provides brief discussions of demographic characteristics of migrant students, their education needs, features of federally funded programs under the new MEP legislation, and suggestions for enhancing migrant student performance.

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DEMOGRAPHICS OF LEP STUDENTS

In order to provide services to migrant children, states must first identify them. Unfortunately, since migrant farmworkers and their families often move across state and even national boundaries, it is difficult to know the exact number of migrant children in a state at a given point in time. Counting migrant children is made more complicated by differing identification and record-keeping practices within different states (Strang et al., 1993). Estimates can vary widely.

U.S. Department of Education (USED) estimates of migrant children in the U.S. for 1990 utilized MEP program eligibility as a criteria for counting migrant students. In 1990, children who had undergone a migratory relocation within the previous six years were regarded as eligible for services. The study reported that states had identified 597,000 children eligible for MEP services (Cox, 1992). In contrast, the National Agricultural Workers Survey conducted in the same year estimated that 587,000 children of migrant workers had undergone a migratory move within only the previous year (Strang et al., 1993). In 1994, 657,373 students were identified by USED as eligible for MEP services, of which approximately 70 percent receive some type of service (from the Migrant Student Record Transfer System, USED, Office of Migrant Education).

Geographical distribution

Migrant agricultural workers and fishers tend to migrate along three principal "streams." The Eastern Stream includes the southern states and the Eastern Seaboard. The Mid-continent Stream begins in Texas, extending north through the Grain Belt and west to California. The West Coast Stream begins in Southern California and extends north (see figure 1).

The states and territories with the highest concentrations of MEP migrant students during the 1992-93 school year are shown in figure 2 (Henderson et al., 1994). Other states with MEP student populations over 10,000 include Alaska, Arizona, Kansas, Kentucky, and Washington (Strang et al., 1993).

Age distribution

Although efforts have increased in recent years to include preschoolers and older migrant youth, most MEP students are enrolled in grades 1 through 6 (see figure 3) (Henderson et al., 1994).

Figure 1

MIGRANT STREAMS			
Eastern		**Central**	**Western**
Alabama	South Carolina	Arkansas	Alaska
Connecticut	Tennessee	Illinois	Arizona
Delaware	Vermont	Indiana	California
Florida	Virginia	Iowa	Colorado
Georgia	West Virginia	Kansas	Idaho
Kentucky	District of	Louisiana	Montana
Maine	Columbia	Michigan	Nevada
Maryland	Puerto Rico	Minnesota	New Mexico
Massachusetts		Missouri	Oregon
Mississippi		Nebraska	Utah
New Hampshire		North Dakota	Washington
New Jersey		Ohio	Wyoming
New York		Oklahoma	
North Carolina		South Dakota	
Pennsylvania		Texas	
Rhode Island		Wisconsin	

Figure 2

State/Territory	No. MEP	Percentage of U.S. Total
California	166,793	30.8 %
Texas	95,703	17.6 %
Florida	33,068	6.1 %
Puerto Rico	21,224	3.9 %
Michigan	19,167	3.5 %
Oregon	18,494	3.4 %

Figure 3

Age group	Age Range	Percentage
K and Pre-K Age	2 - 6 yrs.	14%
Elementary Age	7 -12 yrs.	47%
Secondary Age	13-18 yrs.	35%
"Late Completers"	19-32 yrs.	5%

Language

The USED data from 1992-93 show that 24.9 percent of all MEP program participants had been identified as limited English proficient (LEP); 80 percent of migrant students are identified as Hispanic (Henderson et al., 1994). Another study, which examined the language characteristics of adult migrants, showed that 84 percent of migrant workers speak little or no English, and that 90 percent speak a language other than English in the home (Strang et al., 1993). These figures seem to point to a potentially greater need for bilingual or ESL services than is reflected in the LEP estimate. The linguistic diversity of migrant students varies greatly among the states. Figure 4 shows the top ten migrant states by percentage of LEP students (Henderson et al., 1994).

Figure 4

State	Percentage of LEP Migrant Students
Arizona	51.0 %
Washington	37.6 %
Texas	37.1 %
California	28.2 %
Kansas	27.5 %
Florida	17.4 %
Alaska	16.7 %
Oregon	12.5 %
Michigan	1.5 %
Kentucky	0.4 %

EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Migrant students have unique educational needs stemming from mobility, work and family responsibilities, poverty, and often language. Public schools that are geared towards meeting the needs of a relatively stable population of students residing in a geographic area may be unaware of or have difficulty meeting the special needs of migrant students.

Mobility

Although migrant workers may take into account factors such as the availability of schools or the presence of friends and relatives when moving, ultimately decisions about where and when to move are based primarily on economic necessity. They consider such factors as the length of seasons, changes in crop conditions, wages, and housing availability (Diaz et al., 199?).

Since the family's migration is not patterned around the traditional school year, migrant students experience considerable disruptions in the continuity of their education. Although migrant summer programs enable many students to make up missed instructional time, it is often difficult for migrant students to accrue enough academic credit to stay at grade level with their non-migrant peers (Salerno, 1991). Frequent moves, adjusting to differing school systems, curricula, and social conditions, late starts or early exit during the school year, problems with records and credit transfers are migration-related problems which contribute to lower academic achievement and high dropout rate among migrant students (Cox, 1992).

Work and family responsibilities

In migrant families, children can be expected to work in the fields or to care for younger sibling when their parents are working (Chavkin, 1991). Often, children as young as ten years old can make a significant contribution to their family's income by working rather than attending school (Diaz et al., 199?). This results in an increased level of absenteeism and contributes to the low graduation rate of older MEP students. In addition, working in the fields exposes migrant students to a variety of health risks from accidental injury or exposure to pesticides.

Poverty

According to a 1992 study, about two thirds of migrant students come from families where earnings are below the poverty level (Strang et al., 1993). In addition, the cost of migrating can be high. It is not uncommon for migrants to arrive at a new destination with little or no money or food (Diaz et al, 199?). Many migrant students suffer educational disadvantages stemming from poverty and poverty-related health problems such as malnutrition, parasitic infections and chronic illness, which can directly effect educational performance (Huang, 1993).

Language & Culture

As noted earlier, approximately 80 percent of migrant students come from a Hispanic background, and as many as 90 percent of migrant students may come from homes where a language other than English is spoken. Approximately one third of MEP students were born outside the United States (Cox, 1992), some of whom may have had little or no formal schooling in their native country. In the absence of appropriate instructional services, limited proficiency in English not only impedes academic progress, but can lead to social isolation as well.

FEDERAL LEGISLATION

In 1994, MEP was reauthorized as part of IASA, which was enacted to enable all K-12 students to meet challenging content and performance standards. Given that the needs of migrant students can vary greatly among the states, the federal government has adopted programs which allow maximum flexibility for states to address the needs of the students they serve. The Federal government allocates funds to States Education Agencies (SEAs) based on the estimated number of migrant students residing both permanently and temporarily within the state. Educational services to migrant students are provided in programs which are designed and administered at the state and local level. SEAs can also use federal funds to improve coordination of educational services to migrant students between states. Eligible migrant students may also benefit from federal funds which support state programs for other target groups, such as Chapter 1, bilingual education, or special education. In addition to providing funding for services and leadership, the Federal Government is also charged with facilitating the transfer of migrant students' health and school records.

The new legislation incorporates several important changes with regard to migrant students, aimed at focusing limited federal funds on the neediest students. First, the law specifies that priority be given to resources for the most recently migrant students with the highest risk of academic failure. Prior legislation had given priority to the most recently migrant students without regard to individual need. To facilitate the targeting of funds, eligibility for MEP was redefined to include only students who had undergone a migratory move within the previous three years, as opposed to the previous threshold of six years. Eligibility is extended to youth who are also independent migrant workers. The new legislation also terminates the contract for the centralized Migrant Student Record Transfer System, and requires the Department of Education to seek recommendations for improving the ability of schools and districts to identify students and transfer records.

Technical assistance and training for MEP is presently provided though three Migrant Education Program Coordination Centers (PCCs) located in the three Migrant Streams (please see the following section for contact information). Under the new legislation, technical assistance will be provided though 15 Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers, which will support all IASA programs. The new centers are expected to open in late 1995.

Permissible state activities under the IASA which are specifically related to the education of migrant students include: identification and recruitment, needs assessment, transfer of records and credits, compensatory services for interruptions in schooling, counseling and other services to help overcoming social isolation, and coordination with other programs.

When the educational needs of migrant students are comparable to those of non-migrant Title I students, the law states that migrant students should be served using general Title I allocations. Depending on the programs adopted by the state, these services may include: increased amount and quality of learning time through extended school day or school year programs, preschool and ECE, Head Start/Even Start programs, vocational and academic programs, counseling, mentoring, parental involvement, supplementary assistance for students not meeting standards. For secondary students, Title I funds can be used to sponsor college and career awareness, preparation, and training; school-to-work transition, and partnerships with business. Migrant students also benefit from funding for the professional development of teachers, aides, and counselors.

Similarly, migrants who are limited English proficient may be eligible for services funded through IASA Title VII which are provided by the state to non migrant LEP students. These benefits may include: preschool, elementary, or secondary level bilingual or Special Alternative education, family language education, and funding for training of bilingual instructors.

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING MIGRANT STUDENT PERFORMANCE

As noted above, MEP programs include a wide variety of services to help migrant students overcome educational barriers. Though certain services may be provided by specialized personnel such as bilingual instructors, remedial instructors, counselors, or summer school teachers, regular classroom teachers can also take steps to help migrant students to thrive.

Classroom Buddies

Helping to ease the transition of migrant students to a new school is crucial, especially when the student is a late starter. If a student is disoriented or feels unwelcome, he or she will have difficulty learning. Assigning classroom buddies for new students can help the student to adapt and feel more at home (ERIC/CUE, 1991).

Parent Outreach

It is important for schools and teachers to try to include migrant parents in the school community. Parent involvement and support is significant for a child's initial adjustment and continued performance (Chavkin, 1991). Communicating with rural migrant parents may pose challenges for classroom teachers: parents may be illiterate, may not speak English, may not have a telephone, may live a great distance from the school, or may not wish to be visited. However, communication will increase parents' understanding of their children's education needs and enhance teachers' understanding of the life of the migrant child (Chavkin, 1991).

Attention to Warning Signs

When new students are withdrawn, aggressive, or over-talkative, these may be indicative of adjustment problems rather than general behavior problems (ERIC/CUE, 1991). Teachers should communicate with the students other service providers to determine if the student's affective needs are being adequately addressed.

Extracurricular Activities

Involvement in extracurricular activities can offer a migrant student an additional means of developing social skills and improving self esteem and attitude towards school. Teachers should encourage migrant students to participate in extracurricular activities, especially those which take place during regular school hours, since work responsibilities or transportation problems may pose obstacles to participation in after-school activities (Dyson, 1983).

Effective Schooling

Effective schooling research suggests strategies to promote excellence for all students. These include: maintaining high expectations, personalized contact and smaller classroom size, providing opportunities for students to demonstrate initiative, competence and responsibility (ERIC/CUE, 1991)..

Technical Assistance and Other Resources

The Office of Migrant Education currently operates three Program Coordination Centers, one in each of the three migrant streams, to promote coordination and continuity of services to migrant students and disseminate information on exemplary programs and practices. Pursuant to the new IASA legislation, the activities of these centers will be taken over by Comprehensive Regional Assistance Centers sometime in late 1995.

Eastern Stream	Central Stream	Western Stream
Mr. Robert Levy Director ESCORT 305 Bugbee Hall State University of New York College at Oneonta Oneonta, NY 13820 Phone: (800) 451-8058 (607) 432-0781 Fax: (607) 432-7102	**Mr. Tadeo Reyna** Director Program Coordination Center Campus Box 152 Texas A & I University Kingsville, TX 78363 Phone: (800) 338-4118 (512) 595-2733 Fax: (512) 595-2736	**Mr. Francisco Garcia** Project Director Interface Migrant Education Program Coordination Center 4800 Griffith Drive Suite 202 Beaverton, OR 97005 Phone: (800) 871-3880 (503) 639-0444 Fax: (503) 684-4133

The ERIC Clearinghouse for Rural Education and Small Schools provides bibliographic references and digests of materials of interest to educators of migrant students. They can be contacted at:

ERIC Clearinghouse for
Rural Education and Small Schools
Appalachia Educational Laboratory
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Charleston, WV 25325-1348
Phone: (800) 624-9120
(304) 347-0400
Internet: u56el@wvnvm.wvnet.edu

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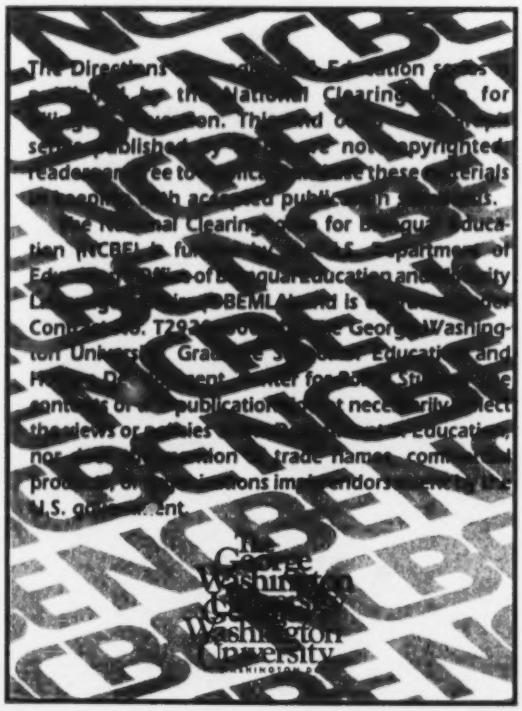

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